

HOME SECRETARY: "COMMUNITIES MUST NOT TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER ON ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR"

The Government today underlined its determination to help rid communities of the scourge of anti-social behaviour with the publication of an action plan that includes trailblazer action areas, specialist prosecutors and a £75 million cash boost, over three years, for local authorities and communities.

The action plan is the second phase of the Government's work to tackle anti-social behaviour. It builds on the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill, currently before Parliament, and the work of the anti-social behaviour unit which has spent the last nine months touring the country and hearing first hand, from the sharp end, the solutions that work and which need to be rapidly spread to other badly affected areas.

Speaking at a national anti-social behaviour conference in London today, the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, set out how the innovative action plan would deliver on the Government's campaign to stamp out anti-social behaviour. Specially targeted will be: 'families from hell' where neighbour nuisance affects the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities; intimidating and thuggish behaviour; as well as environmental crime such as abandoned cars and graffiti.

A snap-shot survey carried out by the Home Office showed that in one day last month local agencies dealt with more than 60,000 reports of anti social behaviour and vandalism – more than one report every two seconds.

Mr Blunkett said:

"It is totally unacceptable that people are having to tolerate this type and level of anti-social behaviour in their communities day in and day out. It causes untold misery, corrodes communal life, undermines public services and forces people to live in fear in their own homes, afraid to go out and enjoy the public space in their community.

"I can't change all this from the Home Office. We have a valuable part to play but need to ensure that powers we introduce and the information we build up at the centre are used effectively.

"People need to hold local agencies to account and ensure that they are willing to respond to the needs of the people whose lives are being made a misery.

"Over the last twelve months we have made a step change in how we set about tackling anti social behaviour with a dedicated Home Office unit to lead the way bringing in tough new powers, helping local agencies to work together with the community.

"We have increased the numbers of police officers, community support officers and neighbourhood wardens across the country and given them more tools – improved ASBOs, acceptable behaviour contracts and fixed penalty notices. This success, and the experience from the USA, shows that real change can be achieved and it is vital that we drive this forward.

"Crime overall has fallen in the last year and we have more police officers on our streets than ever before. But for people to feel that difference we need a fundamental culture change in our society. We must take pride in our communities and challenge those who try to damage them.

"Above all, we need a 'can do' attitude where we simply won't take no for an answer. At every level of our public services we must match the courage and determination of victims and witnesses with an unshakeable resolve to support them to find a solution, and help them claim back their communities.

"Local authorities and communities need to use these tools, to ensure that the tiny minority are not allowed to continue to blight the lives of the law abiding majority."

The new action plan includes:

- **£22million funding:** to strengthen crime reduction partnerships' response to anti-social behaviour.
- **Local trailblazers:** priority areas for action to target anti-social behaviour such as nuisance neighbours, begging and environmental crime.
- **Anti-social behaviour prosecutors:** a new team of specialist prosecutors to work with local communities to spearhead fast, effective prosecution of anti-social behaviour offenders.
- **Action Line:** a new phonenumber and website to help local agencies and practitioners deal effectively with anti-social behaviour, giving advice and information. The actionline and website will be launched in early 2004 alongside a nationwide training programme to ensure that police, local authorities, housing officers, environmental health officers and other key people know what powers they have and how they can best use them to tackle the scourge of anti-social behaviour.
- **Sentencing guidelines:** new guidance for magistrates dealing with anti-social behaviour offences, to ensure appropriate and consistent punishments across the country.

Mr Blunkett added:

"The Government's anti-social behaviour action plan sets out how we will work with the communities blighted by anti-social behaviour to deliver change. The plan will build a new infrastructure, rooted in the experience of frontline practitioners, designed to assist every community and every agency to tackle the problems they face."

Welcoming the action plan on anti-social behaviour Yvette Cooper from the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"Tackling anti-social behaviour is a fundamental part of the drive to improve the quality of life for people in our towns and cities and is key creating sustainable communities.

"People who live in the 10 per cent most deprived wards are much more likely to consider vandalism, litter and graffiti as serious problems in their area than those living in the rest of England.

"Work is already underway in communities across the country to tackle anti-social behaviour - including neighbourhood wardens schemes and locally designed projects to make people proud of where they live. Today's Action Plan will build on this successful work."

Alun Michael, Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said:

"I fully support the programme of actions outlined in the anti-social behaviour action plan.

"Defra has worked closely with the Home Office and other departments over the last twelve months to tackle this problem. There is a clear link between anti-social behaviour and degradation of the local environment and the Government has reflected this in the environment measures in the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill.

"I very much welcome the initiatives outlined in this plan to tackle environmental crime and we will ensure that Defra and its agencies support the Home Office and play our part in ensuring that the improvements we will all wish to see will be realised, sooner rather than later."

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Mr Blunkett was speaking at the Home Office Anti-Social Behaviour Conference at the QEII centre in London on Tuesday 14 October 2003. The conference was also addressed by: the Prime Minister. Tony Blair; Police Minister, Hazel Blears; Director of the Home Office Anti-Social

Behaviour Unit, Louise Casey; Mayor O' Malley from Baltimore and leader of the Council, London Borough of Camden Jane Roberts.

2. The Action plan was published together with 'The experiences of anti-social behaviour' and 'The one day count of anti-social behaviour'. The documents can be read at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>
3. The priority areas for action are as follows:

Tackling nuisance neighbours

- Action against the small numbers of families whose persistent and serious anti-social behaviour wrecks communities.
- Creation of a Nuisance Neighbours Panel to find solutions for the worst families.
- Targeted work in Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Sunderland.

Tackling environmental crime

- Operation Scrap-it - from October 2004 abandoned cars in London and Liverpool will be removed within 72 hours.
- Operation Gate-it – a fund for communities to tackle crime and grime in alleyways. Further details to be announced in February 2004.
- Operation Scrub-it - anti-graffiti initiatives, including a national database of 'taggers' - a poster campaign across transport networks to encourage reporting - pilots in 12 areas to enable local authorities to clean-up street furniture.
- 100 days clean-up - target 10 estates for intensive and sustainable clean-up.

Tackling begging

- Targeted action to reduce begging in the 30 Criminal Justice Interventions Programme areas tackling drug-related crime.
- Trailblazers in Brighton, Bristol, Leeds, Camden and Westminster to significantly reduce begging.

4. The Anti-Social Behaviour White paper 'Respect and Responsibility: Taking a Stand against Anti-Social Behaviour' was published on March 12 2003. The Anti-Social Behaviour Bill was published on March 27 2003. (Press notice 069/2003)
5. Police service strength as at August 2003 was 136,687 officers with more than 1,600 Community Support Officers. (Press notice 268/2003)
6. 1,337 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders had been granted in England and Wales between April 1999 and June 2003. Between June 2000 - March 2003, 3,371 Parenting Orders were issued.

